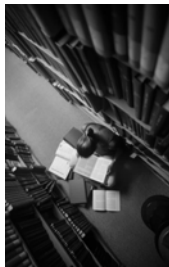


Session Overview

- Introduction
 - My interest
 - Retention and FYE
- Different audiences, different meanings
- Retention: a problematic construct
- Implications for Practice
- Discussion



Georgia Southern University

- 19,000 students
 - ~3,500 first-year students
 - Residential, largely traditional
- One of 35 campuses in University System of Georgia, which has a common core structure
- Growth (+1,300 in Fall 2009)
- Doctoral Research University
- 690-acre campus in Statesboro, Georgia
- 81% fall-to-fall retention rate



My interest in retention

- Director of FYE
 - Report to Associate Provost
 - Unit partially funded by USG "RPG" monies
- Academic expectations/ Academics 101
- First-Year Seminar
 - Two hour, thematic
 - Required in first term
- Intervention (Early Alert grades)
- Undeclared advisement
- Enrollment Management Council



FYE Programs and Retention

- Many programs founded to improve retention
- Increases in funding often couched in terms of improving retention
- Retention is assessed (and thus valued) and is easily quantified



Different audiences, different meanings

What does retention mean?

- To administrators?
- To faculty?
- To students?
- To parents?

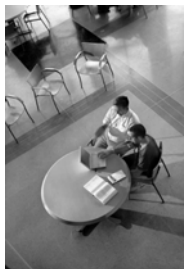


Retention Rate

- In theory measures an institution's success at facilitating students' success.
- To what extent does it?



Retention as a problematic construct



- Institutional success and individual success can work at cross purposes.
- An example: the student who enters intending to transfer
 - With institutional resources geared toward promoting her retention, what structures are in place to help her make a successful transfer?
- See Adelman, *Toolbox Revisited*
 - <http://www2.ed.gov/rschstat/research/pubs/toolboxrevisit/index.html>

Implications for practice: Use “retention” with care

- Shop talk: meaning is often confusing, or worse
- Use almost exclusively with administrators, funders (leverage)



Implications for practice: Focus instead on “student success”

- Unifies everyone: students, faculty, parents and administrators
- Student emphasis applies to touting our institutional success (to most audiences):
 - Avoid: “Our retention rate went up.”
 - Instead: “At Georgia Southern, fewer students are transferring than ever before.”
 - Even better (if it’s true): “At Georgia Southern, fewer students are on probation; grades are up; students are being more successful in their studies than ever before.”



Implications for practice: Build a better model

- Minimally: measure better, look at sub-populations, report more clearly
- Speak with one voice about the shortcomings of retention *while acknowledging that assessment of institutional effectiveness is legitimate*
- Find a better way for measuring institutional success
 - NSSE, YFCY, etc.
 - Student success has to be the benchmark
 - Capture incoming intention



Discussion



- What’s an effective way to communicate institutional success?
- Should institutions be in the business of facilitating smooth transfers? How would that change what we do?
- Are there others ways that a focus on institutional retention can be a disservice to students’ success?
- What information do we lack that would help us build a better model for institutional success?

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